

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Interagency Council on Homelessness



Notes from the Meeting of the Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH)

Date and Time: June 18, 2009; 2:00 pm to 3:30 pm
Location: Thrive DC, 309 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001
Approximate Attendance: 80
An agenda was distributed.

Welcome and Introductions

Neil O. Albert, City Administrator (CA), called the meeting to order and then opened the meeting for comments from the public.

Public Comment Period

- The first speaker said that the La Casa shelter had closed at 6 a.m. on a day when it was raining. He did not think that it was right for residents to have to leave the shelter when it was raining.
- A speaker expressed concern about the availability of shelter capacity for women.
- Concern about safety in the shelters was expressed next, and a speaker suggested that the security guards be issued walkie-talkie radios.
- A speaker called for more computer training for shelter residents, noting that computer literacy is necessary for employment. It was noted that certain shelters have computer literacy programs and assist residents with résumé development. More information is needed in the community about these types of services.
- The final speaker noted that while veterans who are homeless receive vouchers, they also need assistance with the security deposit and the first month's rent. Sue Marshall of The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness (TCP) agreed to talk with this speaker after the meeting.

Summary of the Discussion from the Pre-Meeting Focus Groups–Schroeder Stribling, Deputy Executive Director, N Street Village

- A focus group (round table) was held prior to the ICH meeting so that key issues could be discussed in some detail by members of the homeless community with the findings or conclusions of the discussions presented at the subsequent ICH meeting. This input is sought in order to inform the planning process of the ICH and its committees.
- Participants were asked to reflect on specific questions or topics and to offer their input and perspectives through both small group conversations and in written comments. These questions were discussed today:
 1. “Housing First” is likely to be one of the key policy directives of the Strategic Plan.
 - a. What does “Housing First” mean to you?
 - b. What are the most important elements of a successful “housing first” approach?

2. What resources and supports related to employment are most important to support homeless individuals?
 3. Please take five minutes at the end of your conversation to recommend future topics for the ICH pre-meeting discussion.
- There were twenty-four participants in two facilitated sub-groups. Each question was discussed for about ten minutes, and summaries of the conversations, input, and ideas generated were given at intervals by each group.
 - Schroeder Stribling, Deputy Executive Director, N Street Village, gave a summary of the results of the discussions to the assembled ICH. Also, the output from this session was summarized in a document that is available on the [ICH website](http://www.ich.dc.gov) at www.ich.dc.gov or by contacting [George Shepard](#) of the Department of Human Services (DHS) at (202) 698-5295.
 - A few themes that emerged from the conversations were:
 - Broad input about issues is needed.
 - Key elements of “Housing First” include wrap-around services and case management.
 - There is concern about the supply of housing.
 - The application process for housing should be easy and accessible, and there should be an information and referral clearinghouse for those interested in the program.
 - Transitional housing is still needed for some before they enter a “Housing First” program.
 - Case managers should have reasonable workloads, and their work should be subject to peer review to ensure that customers are being served well and that customer satisfaction is being achieved. Customers should also have a choice in the process.
 - The elements needed to support those seeking employment include: transportation, computer skills, places to shower, clothes, various means of communication, volunteer opportunities, incentives, criminal history expungement or sealing, strength-based skills assessment, employer partnerships, and an information clearinghouse.
 - Mr. Albert asked about how an information clearinghouse would work, and he noted that we need a way to follow-up on these items.

ICH Committee Reports

Steering Committee – Scott McNeilly, Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless (WLCH)

- The committee is starting to explore ways to bring a “collaborative performance management” approach to the delivery of services to those who are homeless in the District. This will involve the setting of goals and establishment of performance benchmarks to evaluate program performance. We want to build a model based on criteria used by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) among other measures, and we want to look at our present Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to ensure that the necessary data are available. If not, we will seek to make changes in the HMIS so that it is producing what we need for proper measurement of program performance.
- We want to ensure adequate participation by all members in the ICH, especially from those individuals who are homeless or formerly homeless. We plan to do outreach to ensure participation by all ICH members.

- There was discussion about adding government agencies, such as the DC Public Library, the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, and others, to the ICH by amending the Homeless Services Reform Act. Other categories of membership would have to be increased commensurately to maintain the balance on the ICH, and this would result in a larger, and perhaps unwieldy, group. A better strategy may be to engage nonmember agencies in the committees so that the ICH will receive the benefit of their input and participation at that level.
- The Mayor's Office of Boards and Commissions is working to fill existing vacancies and to finalize any outstanding appointments. ICH members must be District residents.

Operations and Logistics Committee – Chapman Todd, Catholic Charities

- The committee continues to seek data on administrative reviews from the Office of Administrative Hearings. Scott McNeilly (WLCH) is the point person for this effort. We would like to have comparative data about reviews (year to year or quarter to quarter) from OAH so that we could report on a quarterly basis.
- There was a hypothermia debriefing session for the 2008-2009 season on April 20 at the offices of the United Planning Organization (UPO). The purpose of the meeting was to review the efforts of those involved in carrying out the 2008–2009 Winter Plan in order to assess what worked and what needs improvement. George Shepard published the notes from the session. From the discussion at the debriefing, we learned that capacity was a major concern last season and that the transportation system, especially the portion of it that was operated by UPO, worked well. This was the first season that a published schedule for transportation was used. There were two confirmed deaths attributable to hypothermia during the 2008–2009 season.
- We will use the information from this debriefing session to begin development of the 2009–2010 Winter Plan. The first 2009–2010 winter season planning meeting is scheduled for June 24th from 1:30 to 3:30 pm at DHS Headquarters at 64 New York Avenue, NE, 6th floor. A major challenge for the Winter Plan committee will be capacity. We seek real time input on the plan for the upcoming season, and, to that end, we will hold a public hearing on August 6, 2009.
- This committee continues to study discharge planning, and the intention is to focus on the health and safety issues involved by examining discharges from jails, prisons, and hospitals. One goal is to find ways and means to keep individuals from moving from one institution (e.g., corrections or a hospital) to another, such as the shelter system. The DC Hospital Association (DCHA), the Department of Corrections (DOC), the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA), and the Criminal Justice Coordination Council (CJCC) are among organizations and agencies involved in this effort. We want to reinvigorate the discharge planning efforts that were started years ago and, using that work as a base, move forward in this area.
- There is still a need for a comprehensive resource guide, and we continue seek ways to provide current, accurate, and comprehensive information to all interested parties. We want to build on what is already available, and we may seek ways to engage with the District's Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO) to develop usable applications.

Strategic Planning Committee – Clarence Carter, Director, DHS

- The Strategic Planning Committee is a multi-disciplinary team seeking ways to end homelessness, and it continues its work by identifying policy objectives, constituencies that we are to serve, and service strategies across seven dimensions, namely, Available to All, Mental Health, Substance Abuse, Domestic Violence, Employment, Discharge Planning, and Healthcare/HIV. The constituencies are individual men, women, and youth; families; seniors; veterans; and ex-offenders.

- Four broad policy objectives that have been identified are prevention of homelessness, exit from homelessness, redesign of the continuum of care, and evaluation of progress in preventing and reducing homelessness.
- The committee has held meetings with constituents and with partner organizations and a public meeting will be scheduled soon in cooperation with the Operations and Logistics Committee.

Update on the Permanent Supportive Housing Initiative including the Appropriation for the District in the President's Budget–Fred Swan and Laura Zeilinger, both of DHS

- To date, 3,400 individuals have been surveyed using the vulnerability assessment tool, and 453 have been housed. The program continues with individuals being placed in housing on a daily basis. The target for housing individuals is 630 by the end of the fiscal year.
- There have been 361 families surveyed to date, and forty-seven have been housed. The target for housing families is eighty by the end of the fiscal year.
- We will hold a stakeholder's meeting in September to address any issues arising from this program and to hear about successes and challenges. We are collaborating with the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless for this event.
- There is an allocation of \$19.2 million for permanent supportive housing for the District of Columbia in President Obama's proposed budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2010. This is still under consideration in Congress.
- The District submitted its formal request for \$7.5 million in Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) funds on May 18, 2009. The funds should be available by the end of July. They must be committed by September, and 60% of the funds must be spent in two years. The funds must be completely expended in three years.
- A portion of these funds will be used to develop and implement a uniform assessment tool for those in low barrier shelters. This assessment is anticipated to yield information that will allow us to connect low barrier shelter residents to appropriate services and placements. Additionally, we will train those doing outreach in the use of the tool, and we will also target special populations, such as youth, for assessment and appropriate services and placements.

Update on Shelter Capacity–Michael Ferrell, Coalition for the Homeless

- The committee concerned with shelter capacity matters and issues held its first meeting on June 11, 2009. The committee is seeking ways to better utilize existing shelters on a year-round basis.
- A preliminary finding is that there is underutilization of bed capacity in the transitional shelter system. It would be beneficial to move individuals from the low barrier system to the transitional shelters. The committee will look for barriers to moving from one system to the other as its work progresses.
- A member of the ICH, Cheryl Barnes, commented that we should have dedicated facilities available for seniors, those in wheelchairs, and others with special needs, especially of a medical nature. One suggestion was to use closed school buildings for these special purpose facilities.
- Nan Roman, President and CEO of the National Alliance to End Homelessness and a member of the ICH, noted that there was a capacity calculator available on the website of her organization. Also, there are innovative ways to reduce the length of stay in shelter. We need to research these and apply what works to our system.

- Scott McNeilly, WLCH, stated that capacity was a real concern and that we need a resolution soon. Mr. Albert stated that we need practical solutions to the matter of capacity and to the full utilization of the transitional system.

Overview of Thrive DC–Alicia Horton, Executive Director

- Ms. Horton welcomed the ICH members and guests to Thrive DC, noting that this is a day program serving breakfast and dinner and that employment services, computer training, and case management are available among other services. Additional information is available at the organization's website, Thrivedc.org.
- Originally founded in 1979 as the Dinner Program for Homeless Women, Thrive DC is an independent, 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that works to prevent and end homelessness by providing vulnerable individuals with a comprehensive range of services to help stabilize their lives. Thrive DC provides the last available safety net for people facing economic crisis and housing instability while also providing the first step towards independence for people experiencing extended periods of homelessness.

Public Comment Period

- The first speaker noted that there had been a recent death of an individual who was homeless and on the street. He said that the decedent had been “failed by all systems,” and he called for getting the most vulnerable individuals off the streets.
- The same incident was addressed by two other speakers, both of whom said that the decedent had chosen to live outside.
- A representative of a group called The People for Fairness Coalition said that those engaged in homeless services, including outreach workers, need to meet people where they are. The speaker said that the state of homelessness was like being “totally out of control” and that the primary resources for him were the library, the Veterans Administration, and the church.
- Another representative from The People for Fairness Coalition inquired about how many veterans had been placed in permanent supportive housing,¹ and he said that all veterans should be off the streets. Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) vouchers are available through the DC Housing Authority (DCHA).
- A speaker called for the creation of more programs like Thrive DC. Also, this speaker noted that the District has a high incidence of substance abuse, a factor in homelessness. He wondered if those with addictions would be housed. The response was that, under a “Housing First” program, individuals are housed immediately, and case management services are provided to deal with any problems or challenge that they have, such as substance abuse.
- Another speaker said that there were many resources that were not being used and that it was “morally disgusting” to see people living outside. The speaker criticized the closure of the Franklin Shelter and implied that the bed shortage resulted from this action. The speaker finished by stating that we should have more dialogue with those who are experiencing homelessness.
- There was a question about how we determined who was “most vulnerable” for the “Housing First” placements. Laura Zeilinger of DHS explained that we use a vulnerability score (index) in conjunction with the length of homelessness and input from outreach workers and others who know clients under consideration for placement. We use a model developed by Common Ground,² an organization based in New York City that is a pioneer in the development of

¹ There were 86 veterans in permanent supportive housing as of the date of this meeting.

² See www.commonground.org for more information.

supportive housing and other research-based practices that end homelessness. The speaker also stated that we need to do more for those who use wheelchairs.

- A speaker said that he did not like the rules at Adams Place Shelter.
- A speaker said that he was more comfortable living on the street and that he did not like the nightly lineup for low barrier shelter beds, characterizing it as “more hassle than it is worth.” He continued by complaining about the vulnerability index, and he wanted to know how the public could get more information about who is being housed.
- A representative from a provider wanted more engagement by the providers in the development of the strategic plan. He also called for support from those who are advocates.
- Mr. Albert said that we welcome robust feedback and communication with consumers about planning since they are impacted.

Adjournment: After the public comment period, Mr. Albert adjourned the meeting.

###

Next Meetings (Dates and times are subject to change.)

- Wednesday, September 2, 2009 at N Street Village, 1333 N Street, NW from 2:30 to 4:00 pm.
The pre-meeting roundtable session will take place from 1:00 pm to 2:00 pm.
- Thursday, October 22, 2009 at Miriam’s Kitchen, 2401 Virginia Avenue, NW, from 2 to 3: 30 pm.
The pre-meeting roundtable session will take place from 12:30 to 1:30 pm.
- Thursday, December 17, 2009 at Church of the Epiphany, 1317 G Street, NW from 2 to 3: 30 pm.
The pre-meeting roundtable session will take place from 12:30 pm. to 1:30 pm.